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AN INTERVIEW WITH NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS¹

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS BY PRINCIPAL W. F. ADENEY, M.A., D.D., OF LANCASHIRE COLLEGE, ENGLAND; PROFESSOR D. A. HAYES, D.D., OF GARRETT BIBLICAL INSTITUTE; PROFESSOR A. T. ROBERTSON, D.D., OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY; AND PROFESSOR FRANK C. PORTER, D.D., OF YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL.

6. What is your thought concerning the relation of Jesus' ancestry and parentage to present-day Christian faith in him?

I fear that many minds are disturbed by this question; but only, as it seems to me, through an unfortunate way of handling it, for which some of the most vociferous champions of the faith are responsible. When giving popular lectures on subjects connected with biblical criticism in various parts of England, I am more often confronted with this question from members of the audience than with any other. Evidently it is "in the air." Now, I find that the more thoughtful and educated laymen, as well as Free Church ministers, are quite willing to concede that, whatever may be the historical facts as to the physical mode of our Lord's birth, these facts do not touch the infinitely more important question of his divinity; that this stands sure and certain, whether we believe that he was born from a virgin or not. But in the Church of England, under the influence of the creeds, to which many cling as though they were the most vital and essential elements of our faith, there is a strong tendency to connect the virgin-birth of our Lord with his divinity, so that, if the one were to be abandoned, as it is represented, the other must go too. This is used as an appeal *ad terrorem* to vindicate the virginity of Mary. It is easy to see how it may be turned the other way, with disastrous results. I hold most strongly that this is a fatal mistake. I consider that our reasons for believing in our Lord's divinity should be the reasons which convinced Paul, Peter, John, and apparently all the apostolic church; the virgin-birth does not seem to have been known to any of the great teachers in the early period. This is not a reason for disbelieving it as a historical fact; but it must be regarded as

¹ Continuing the interview published in the August number.

coming into the region of historical inquiry apart from the fundamental articles of the Christian faith.

W. F. A.

I believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary. I believe that any other creed is inconsistent with present-day evangelical church membership. I believe that multitudes who do not subscribe to our creed may and do have saving faith in Christ.

D. A. H.

If it should come to be accepted that Jesus was merely the son of Joseph and Mary, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to retain faith in him as the God-man. It may be that in the abstract the divine essence could be united with the human, both parents being human. That is a purely speculative, philosophical problem that can arise only by getting rid of the entire birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, which is very difficult; for the two gospels give independent, though harmonious, traditions. There remains besides the actual, not ideal, pre-existence attributed to Jesus by Paul and John, which involves the twofold nature and suits exactly the virgin-birth of Jesus. If only the miraculous position of the gospel narratives is rejected, then the bald and revolting charge of the Talmud remains, with gospel support, that Jesus was the illegitimate, though technically legal, child of Joseph and Mary. This was the burden that Mary had to bear in Nazareth; for she could not tell the true story of this birth to any save the most intimate friends. She pondered these things and kept them in her heart. The delicacy and restraint of Matthew and Luke argue for the correctness of the narratives of the birth. Heathen parallels are not real parallels. It is conceivable that one, on philosophical grounds, having rejected the entire narrative and disposed of the charge of the Talmud, may still retain faith in Jesus as the God-man, but it is a very untenable position. However, it is not conceivable that God would have united the divine essence with the nature of a child begotten in the ordinary way out of wedlock. The virgin-birth of Jesus is not only scriptural, but it is the only view that meets all the demands of the delicate situation on rational grounds.

A. T. R.

I regard it as important that Christian faith should disengage itself completely from the birth histories of Matthew and Luke. This

need not express a settled conviction that the stories are not historical, but only a recognition of the fact that they belong to the province of historical research and not to that of dogma. Furthermore, Mark 12:35-37 makes even Davidic descent unessential to Christian faith. Jesus disclaimed being a son of David in the only sense in which this could have significance—that of an acceptance of the Davidic ideal.

F. C. P.

7. What do you regard as essential to Christian faith in respect to the resurrection of Jesus?

The appearance and active life of our Lord after death. There is very strong evidence that the tomb was empty; and no satisfactory explanation of the fact has been forthcoming, except the idea generally accepted in the church that there was a bodily resurrection. Still, this concerns only the form of the resurrection. The reality, and what is of importance to us, is the continued presence and power of the living Christ in the church. (See Rev. 1:18.)

W. F. A.

I believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. I believe that a man may be a Christian and not agree with me on that point. The essential in Christian faith is the belief in the possibility of the present realization of the life of the risen Christ in the hearts of men.

D. A. H.

The actual resurrection of Jesus from the grave was made the corner-stone of the preaching of the apostles. To this incontestable fact Peter, Paul, and the rest publicly appealed as proof of the claims of Jesus, and the approval of God upon Christ and Christianity. To give up this point is to give up the corner-stone in the argument made by Christ himself about himself. Then the belief that he rose rests upon a delusion. To deny that Jesus rose from the grave, and was seen by the apostles and others, is to leave Christianity without an adequate explanation. They themselves were the chief sceptics of his resurrection. They were with difficulty convinced of it. They refused to believe the women till Peter was able to testify. To say that they saw the spirit of Jesus does not help the situation at all; for that would be a real intervention on the part of God, a miracle, and a miracle as difficult to believe as the resurrection of the body. Christian faith flounders when it doubts this cardinal and well-attested

fact. The only real difficulty about it is that of miracles, and that difficulty rests chiefly on a wrong conception of God as a God who is not greater than his own laws, who has no personal will higher than objective nature.

A. T. R.

I should not wish to make my own view of the resurrection essential to Christian faith; for I recognize that the resurrection, like the birth, is, in a primary aspect of it, a historical question. The birth story embodies the faith that Jesus is the Son of God. I hold this faith, but regard it as independent of the story. What faith do the accounts of the resurrection embody? To me it seems to be the faith that Jesus truly lives as spirit and Lord, and that because he lives we are to live, now in newness of life, and hereafter in oneness with him. But if to others the essential thing appears to be that the divine spirit which was in Christ, the spirit of truth, the spirit of a new life of holiness and love, lives on and works ever for men's enlightenment and salvation, being another than Jesus and yet one with him in character, making his life and truth a perpetual power (see John 14:16 f.; 16:13-15), then I should not be willing to claim that my view, which clings to a more personal presence of Jesus, is essential to Christian faith in general. I prefer to leave room, in view of the historical difficulties with which the matter is confessedly beset, for a view which regards the presence of Christ in a more ideal and less personal way, and rests in that presence of the Father which Christ revealed and communicated.

F. C. P.

8. What is for you the decisive or most convincing argument for the future life of the righteous?

The teaching of Christ, confirmed by his resurrection, and supplemented by the fact that those who have best imbibed his spirit, and thus learned to walk most closely in union with God, are most sure that, as he taught, they will never be abandoned to death.

W. F. A.

The resurrection life of the man Jesus.

D. A. H.

The present existence and power of Christ is the chief guarantee of future life to the righteous. "Because I live, ye shall live also." The testimony of science is only and necessarily negative, though not actually hostile. Positive evidence can come only from the realm of spirit, which science cannot touch. The soul can never be put under the microscope.

A. T. R.

No arguments are to me convincing that do not run back to the one suggested, though in somewhat rabbinic form, by Christ's inference from the phrase, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Those who know that God is their God can lay hold, almost as by a real experience, of the faith that no power, not even death, can dissolve that communion and separate them from the love of God. But this love of God, which is the ground of our hope, is known to us only through our human love and through insight into its eternity and divinity. Not our love of life, but our love of one another, lies therefore at the root of our Christian hope. Few of us, however, could have such confidence in our inner experience of love and of God, if it were not confirmed by the greatest and best of men. That so many of the great company of men of God have held this faith, and that Christ held it, enables lesser souls to make it their own. The fundamental religious experience, that of communion with God in love, resting on our human love as its ground and proof, and the testimony of those to whom this communion has been most real and immediate, are to me the decisive grounds for the hope of life to come. F. C. P.

9. What is your theory of the relation of the synoptic gospels to one another?

I hold that Mark was written first, and subsequently edited in a slightly modified form, so that its primitive roughness was smoothed. Matthew and Luke I consider to be founded on the primitive Mark. For Matthew this was split in five places, and five blocks of Matthew's *Logia* were wedged into the chasms thus made. The infancy and resurrection narratives were added from other sources. Luke, though using the primitive Mark, and also Matthew's *Logia*, in another translation, and less exactly, had several other sources, especially for the infancy and resurrection narratives, and for the Pericope. W. F. A.

Mark was the earliest written. Matthew and Luke were written probably about the same time. They both used Mark or his sources. They were probably independent of each other. D. A. H.

The synoptic problem is the most difficult question in New Testament criticism. Certainty will perhaps never be attained. As a working hypothesis, I regard Mark, Matthew, Luke as the probable order. I think that the oral, documentary, and mutual-dependence

theories all have an element of truth in them, though neither by itself can explain all the phenomena.

A. T. R.

I hold the two-source theory in a form that recognizes a primitive Mark behind our second gospel, and regards the other source, the so-called *Logia*, as a complex line of sources, rather than a finished collection used alike by Matthew and Luke. My view of the sources is such that I think it necessary, in the case of each narrative or saying, to compare all parallels, and attempt by general historical tests, rather than by a pre-established theory, to recover the original form. I also regard it as necessary to try to get behind the literary sources and retrace, where it is possible, the course of the underlying traditions.

F. C. P.

10. What is your estimate of the value of the order of Mark's gospel for the chronology of the life of Jesus?

In spite of Papias, I think the order correct in the main. This is indicated by the gradual unveiling and late confession of our Lord's messiahship.

W. F. A.

I regard both Luke and John as more helpful, in fixing the chronology of the life of Jesus than Mark.

D. A. H.

Mark's gospel I consider excellent for the chronology of the life of Jesus, so far as it goes. It does not, however, cover all the public ministry. But it is an objective and, in the main, chronological sketch of the Galilean and later ministry.

A. T. R.

I do not regard the order of Mark's gospel as chronological, except in a few self-evident points. The recovery of a detailed chronology of the life of Jesus seems to me impossible.

F. C. P.

11. What is your view of the authorship of the fourth gospel, and of the value of this gospel as a source for the life of Jesus?

I think the fourth gospel rests essentially on the authority of John. If he did not write it with his own hand, or directly dictate it, I hold that there is good reason to believe that he supplied both its incidents and its teachings. I think it most valuable in Clement's way of regarding it as a "spiritual gospel." In this sense it is a real and true *gospel*, i. e., presentment of the Savior. It gives us deeper insight into the spirit of Christ than the synoptics. It is not a photo-

graph; it is better. It is a lifelike painting by one who understood the soul of his subject. The language of our Lord's teaching is recast in the style of the evangelist. But we have here his most intimate thought as nowhere else in the world.

W. F. A.

I follow Meyer, Luthardt, Weiss, Godet, Westcott, Lightfoot, Sanday, Ezra Abbot, Drummond, and other equally good authorities in ascribing the authorship of the fourth gospel to the apostle John. I regard it as an invaluable and incomparable source for the life and teachings of our Lord.

D. A. H.

The gospel of John still stands as the work of the apostle. The recent résumé of the controversy in Dr. James Drummond's book is very significant. It is a reflection and contemplative presentation of the career of Jesus from a dogmatic point of view, as is the gospel of Matthew. The wonderful words of Christ are sublimated through the long experience of John, but none the less they are worthy to stand beside the reports in the synoptics. The picture of Christ in John is not so much a new picture as it is an expansion of our view of him already in the synoptics—a picture in singular harmony with the temperament and position of John the beloved disciple.

A. T. R.

The authorship of the fourth gospel is to me still an open question. My inclination, in spite of contrary tendencies in modern criticism, is to see in it the work, though in secondary rather than primary form, of a disciple of Jesus, that is, a witness of his earthly life. As a historical source of the life and teachings of Jesus it must be made subordinate to the synoptic gospels, and judged largely by them; yet at several points its testimony must be reckoned with. I am inclined to put more stress on the personal than on the Hellenistic element as accounting for the peculiarities of this gospel; and I think that criticism has too often spent itself in making allowances for this personality as a disturbing element in the tradition of the life of Christ, and so failed to realize his greatness as an interpreter of the spirit of Christ.

F. C. P.